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Colombian Political Situation Preceding  
Bogotá Conference, 30 March 1948

In the 16 March 1947 election, Gabriel Turbay (Liberal) ran against Mariano Ospina Pérez (Conservative). A large segment of the Liberal party bolted and selected Jorge Eliecer Gaitán as their candidate. As a result of this split, Ospina Pérez was elected, polling 600,000 votes (Turbay 300,000, and Gaitán 400,000). The Liberals gained control of both houses of Congress. In the election Gaitán received Communist support, which he ignored after the election.

As a result, President Ospina Pérez set up a "Union Government", in which he distributed all appointments fairly equally among Conservatives and Liberals. This government, however, was never entirely satisfactory to the Liberals. Gaitán worked to regain control of the Liberal Party, and on 24 October 1947 was selected as its candidate for the 1950 presidential election. The regular Liberals accepted the decision and Gaitán became head of the party. Information indicates the Communists intended to support Gaitán, though expecting he would publicly be indifferent to them.

In the meantime "Union Government" was being increasingly subjected to attack. Disaffection in the Liberal ranks increased as time went on, because of the dissatisfaction of the Gaitán segment with the policy of collaboration. Armed clashes occurred in various parts of the country between Conservatives and Liberals. The Gaitán Liberals accused the President of failing to maintain order and protect Liberals throughout the country.

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Steps taken by the Conservative President to meet the Liberal protests continued to be unacceptable, and, at a party convention on 29 February 1948, the Liberals resolved to withdraw from the "Union Government" and passed the word to all their officeholders to resign. They made one exception, namely those Liberal members of the Colombian delegation to the Bogotá Conference. During the next several weeks Liberal officeholders complied with the party's instructions, thereby making it necessary for the President to make new appointments. On 22 March 1948 an all-Conservative cabinet was appointed. This government was in office when the Bogotá Conference met on 30 March 1948.

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